

The Athenian Mercury:

Tuesday, January 12. 1691.

Quest. 1. **I** Have long liv'd in an unlawful, and successful Amour. I have enjoy'd all the Favours that a lovely young Woman can bestow. I am very sensible of the Sin I commit, as well as the Injury I do the Husband. My Circumstances and Employment are such I cannot quit this Town or Land, nor wou'd willingly expose her Reputation: I therefore give you the trouble of this to beg your Advice what measures I shall take (besides those prescrib'd by Religion) to avoid this lovely Tempter, who will not fail to press me to a continuance of my Passion, which I am resolv'd to quit. Your Directions in this case will very much oblige — Yours, &c.

Ans. This being a thing of more than ordinary moment, as well in its self as from the Influence it may have upon others, we thought fit to print the Letter at large, to let our Gallants see, that there are yet some imitable Examples left, of penitence at least, if not of perfect Virtue.

In answer, We first hope the Gentleman is in earnest, and that he needs no more Arguments to convince him of the absolute necessity there is of his leaving this damnable Sin. He asks what measures he shall take besides those prescribed by Religion? we reply, none at all, for that reaches the Case in all its Circumstances, since it directs not only to Purity, but to Prudence and Generosity too, in things of this Nature. Joseph when tempted by his Mistress wou'd not ruine her Reputation, by revealing it to his Master, tho' this Generosity had almost cost him his Life; much less we think ought any to do so who have either bin the sole Tempters, or at least equally guilty. The same Holy Books teach us Prudence in the same case, both in Joseph's Example, and in Solomon's Precepts, one who had bin but too well acquainted with things of that Nature. Joseph hearkened not to his Mistress so much as to be with her, for he knew 'twas dangerous venturing near so fair an Enemy: And Solomon says, Come not near the door of her House, keep out of Eye-shot, and to be sure there is no danger. But this common Prudence may be branch'd out into particular acts, as the Temptations may press. What has been already said we think may be sufficient in general, in what manner to avoid her; but we'll go further, as we suppose the Querist desires, and direct him how to break off intirely. This we'd advise him by no means to do personally, for the Reasons before mention'd, but by Letter, in which if he please he may enclose this Paper, which perhaps may make the Breach incurable; and if it does, so much the better, for hee'll have the less trouble afterward. Prudence and Generosity will still direct him what the Subject of the Letter ought to be, and that 'tis the Sin and Danger to both their Souls, which is the real occasion of the Breach, using the same arguments to convince her, and make her a real Convert to Virtue and Honour, which he found before work'd on his own mind. But what e're she pretends, see her no more, if possible to be avoided; at least converse not with her, nor receive Letters from her, but to the Fire with 'em as soon as e're you perceive they are hers, if you are sure of the Hand without so much as opening 'em, or else you'll endanger the rekindling a worse Flame in your Breast, than that from which you have sav'd 'em. As for your self, have a care of Relapses, more dangerous than the Disease. Remember you are now engag'd against all your Enemies at once, the World, the Flesh, and the Devil — They'll struggle hard, but there are more with you than against you. Read in the Ingenious Benvolio and Urania, the Conflict between Nickomachus and Orestis, with her other Sisters. Virtue, Religion and Honour engage on your side, and Glory is your Reward — and as the Divine Herbert says, If rottenness have more, let Heaven go.

Quest. 2. A Gentlewoman that has a Husband who used her barbarously, makes her go in danger of her Life, and keeps a Whore, refusing to live with her, but making her work for her Bread, having the offer of a single Gentleman that will maintain her very well: Whether it be any Sin to accept of his kindness?

Ans. Here are several ambiguous words in this Question, which must be explained before we can go any further — [Offer of a single Gentleman] — [to maintain her] to [accept of his kindness] If the words, offering to maintain, signifie keeping in the usual Sence on't, as by the circumstances 'tis extremely probable they do; and if by the accepting his kindness, be meant being kind to him agen, then the Case is clear; and why all this fine clean Language to wrap up that broad word WHORE, with which she so fairly brands one that is kept by her Husband, when about to bring her self into the same Circumstances: Is't any Case of Conscience whether a Woman ought to turn Whore because her Husband is a Whoremaster? Has he been never so brutish and barbarous, tho' perhaps hee'd represent her as ill might he speak for himself, is that any excuse to her to imitate him? or will she be so mad to stab her self, and infinitely worse, because her Husband has put her in danger of her Life? But we'll take the Case at fairest — Suppose the Gentleman wou'd only generously supply her necessities and expect no criminal returns for his kindness, if such a thing be possible in such an Age, or rather else let's say, pretends to expect none, yet 'tis ill trusting him, 'tis a dangerous Experiment, 'tis much more honourable and honest to get her Living by painful Labour, nay almost by begging it self, supposing he has ever made any pretences to her, or she has reason to believe he intends any such thing.

Quest. 3. Suppose the Querist have a Daughter about twenty years of Age, and a Brother about the same Age, and they happen to have so sincere and earnest a passion for each other, that it's fear'd no reason will prevail with 'em from marrying; or if prevented, in all probability will occasion their ruine in this World: Query, Whether upon this consideration may the Marriage be solemniz'd with hope of Gods Blessing, and the quiet enjoyment of their Liberties and Estates to them and their posterity, notwithstanding any scruples that may be rais'd against it?

Ans. If it be absolutely unlawful and forbidden by Gods Word, undoubtedly it ought by no means to be contented to; nay those concern'd can't acquit themselves by being only passive in the case. That 'tis so, seems the positive Judgment of our Church and Nation; for we find in the Table of Kindred and Affinity, Num. 25. the Brothers Daughter among the prohibited Degrees to the Man, and the third to the Woman, her Fathers Brother being forbidden her, and this as its said there, In Scripture and our Laws. Its true, here's a doubt, whether those words are taken together or asunder, that is, Whether were intended thereby that all these degrees were forbidden both by the Laws of God and the Laws of the Land, or some by one and some by the other, tho' this is clear'd in the Canon it self, which says, 'That none shall marry within the Degrees prohibited by the Laws of God, and expressed in a Table set forth by Authority, An. D. 1553. (in the Reign of Blessed Qu. Elizabeth) from which Table we have taken the two former Prohibitions. Nay further, 'That all Marriages so made and contracted, shall be adjudged incestuous and unlawful, and consequently shall be dissolv'd as void from the beginning, and the Parties so marry'd shall by course of Law be separated.' Here then is the venerable Judgment and Authority of the best regulated Church in the World, that such a Marriage is absolutely unlawful, and ipso facto void, and that in Conjunction with the authority of

of the State which declares the same. But supposing it indifferent of it self, undoubtedly it ceases to be so when Authority determines as it does here, otherwise it is no Authority. If we come to Scripture, its true its not there expressly forbidden, tho' it seems to be by parity of Reason; for in the 18th. of Leviticus, the *Fathers Sister* and *Mothers Sister* are absolutely forbidden, and *Fathers Brother* is no farther off than his Sister, tho' it must be acknowledg'd there may be some difference between the *ascend* and *descent*, tho' not enough to make either lawful. The Summ is, that we think the Gentleman oblig'd in Conscience to hinder this incestuous Marriage, whatever the Consequences may be, and the Parties immediately concern'd to break off this unlawful Amour, tho' with the hazard of their Lives, for those prohibitions mention'd are certainly natural, and not ceremonial, as appears from v. 24. of the forecited Chap. *Defile not your selves in any of these things, for in all these the Nations are defiled, which I call out before you.*

Quest. 4. *A Young Man of a very amorous disposition, has had the misfortune to yield to every attack of his Passion, and being strait charm'd with every new Object, hath promis'd two several Young Gentlewomen Marriage, and thereby enjoy'd 'em both. This heat of imprudent Love being over, he is very sensible of his Fault, and very melancholly upon it: His Inclinations don't lead him to have either of 'em, tho' he's fully perswaded of their Love and true Affection, and this aversion is the more because he sees he can't have one without rendring the other discontented and implacable, nor can he see any means to make her or them a satisfactory restitution: I therefore beg your best Advice you can in this matter, it being of Consequence, and this grief requiring a speedy remedy, &c.*

Ans. First let him heartily beg pardon of God Almighty, and continue the same every day he lives. Then, unless there be any private Reason, or rather necessity, why he shou'd marry one more than the other, (and there can be but one, which he may easily guess) he ought, we think, to marry neither, unless one shou'd release him, or dye, in which case, notwithstanding any pretended or real Aversion, he must marry her that's left free: If they both live, and refuse to release him, he must remain all his Life single, since he cannot lawfully marry either of them, or any other.

Quest. 5. *A Young man being in Love with a Young Gentlewoman, promis'd her Marriage without the knowledge of his own Parents, tho' her Parents did both know and approve it; and it may be if he had given notice of it to his Parents they would have consented to it. It happened the Young man being gone to Travel, found another occasion of Marriage as well more pleasant to his Fancy, as advantageous to his Fortune: Now the Question is, Whether without wounding his Conscience, and with the consent of his Parents for the other, he may leave the former and take the latter? — This Question belongs to a Countrey where all promises of Marriage being Clandestine, are void without the consent of the Parents on both sides?*

Ans. Notwithstanding all this, the Prior Obligation is still valid, unless he can get a release from the former, and tho' he may be free in *Foro humano*, yet we think he is still oblig'd in *Foro Conscientiae*, tho' he did ill to promise without the Consent of his own Parents as well as hers.

Quest. 6. *Why Women are for the most part fonder and falser than men?*

Ans. We shall deny they are so for the most part, until the Querist has told all the Noses in the World. For their Fondness, none e're went further in the Tryal on't that we e're read or heard of, than *Spencers Squire of Dames*, and he made the Experiment, as we remember, but on three hundred, but that's all a spiteful roguish Fable, invented on purpose by the angry Poet for the loss of his Mistress; and wou'd some fair Lady make the same Tryal, undoubtedly she'd find fewer Denials than he did, supposing the Story true. Then for their being falser too, the Objector unluckily destroys one part of the Calumny by the other; for if fonder, how falser? if falser, how fonder? Indeed we men are generally the Painters, and order all things how we please — we write the Histories of Women, and

represent our selves and them as we think fit, but they seldom either write ours, or defend themselves: But grant the observation true in some cases, yet the poor Ladies are easily excus'd: If they are fond, 'tis disingenuous to blame 'em, and we seldom think 'em so till we are willing to leave 'em: If they are false, 'tis we teach it 'em, and they are often driven into it either out of despair or revenge.

Quest. 7. *Whether after Promises made between two persons, they mayn't lawfully leave each other, and accept or court others by mutual Consent?*

Ans. We think there's no doubt to be made but they may, the obligation being mutual, and just as much on one side as the other, so that both giving up their part there's no wrong done — Nay, we think 'twou'd be very requisite they shou'd do so in some cases; as where there's no probability of living otherwise than poorly and miserably if they shou'd come together: for tho' Love may make a shift to keep 'em warm before Marriage, they won't find that alone will do it afterwards.

Quest. 8. *Whether Sappho or Mrs. Behn were the better Poetess?*

Ans. We must beg the Person of Honours pardon who sent this Question, if we can't help telling a pleasant passage before we answer it, 'tis met with in the Voyages of one *Struis a Dutchman*, about some 10 years since translated into English; and 'tis this, p. 288. In the City of *Ardebil* in Persia are a Corporation of Whores, all Poetesses, whose chief Subject is the praise of the Emperor. This unlucky Story was brought to mind by some woful Loyal Plays, which for 2 Reigns together pester'd the Theaters and Stationers, which is all we will say of 'em, considering whose they were, but come now to the comparison: *Sappho* writ too little, and *Mrs. Behn* too much, for us to give 'em any just or equal Character, not but that by the little, very little we have of *Sappho*, we believe hardly ever were 2 Souls more alike than *Mrs. Behn* and hers. *Mrs. Behn*, its true, has writ many things, and some of 'em excellently well, in her own soft strain, few coming near her; particularly in her *Lovers Watch*, which if we mistake not, we formerly mention'd. And then her *Voyage to the Island of Love*, proves her a great proficient both in the Theory and practical part of that passion: But yet one Fragment consisting but of a few Lines, which we have of *Sappho's*, carries something in it so soft, lushious and charming even in the sound of the words, that *Catullus* himself, who has endeavour'd somewhat like 'em in Latin, comes infinitely short of 'em, and so have all the rest who have writ their own thoughts on that Subject; — for which reason we cou'd wish *Mrs. Behn* herself had translated 'em before she went to *Elysium* to meet her.

Advertisements.

TO Morrow being the 13th. Instant, will be Published a Book Entituled *England's Miseries*, set forth in their true Light, being a brief History of the manifold difficulties this Kingdom laboured under in the Reigns of King *James* the First and his Unfortunate Son, which brought on our Civil Wars and the Death of King *Charles* the First, and at last caused the Abdication of King *James* the Second, with the Declaration for Lawful Sports to be used on Sundays. By a Person of Quality. Sold by *Richard Baldwin* near the *Oxfords-Arms* in *Warwick-lane*.

AT *Mile-end-Green*, the Sign of the green Gun, being a fair large House, having a Bowling-green, Stable and Out-houses, is to be Lett, inquire at Mr. *Crisp's* at the *Kings Arms*, next door to the Gun, and you may know further.